

CAMPYLOBACTERIOSIS

What is campylobacteriosis? Campylobacteriosis is a gastrointestinal disease caused by a type of bacteria called *Campylobacter*. Illness usually occurs 2 to 5 days after exposure to *Campylobacter* and lasts about a week. The illness is usually mild and some people with campylobacteriosis have no symptoms at all. However, in some persons with compromised immune systems, it can cause a serious, life-threatening infection. The diagnosis is usually made when a laboratory finds *Campylobacter* in the stool of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis? Symptoms of campylobacteriosis include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever. Most people with campylobacteriosis recover completely. However, a small percentage of people may have joint pain and swelling after infection. In addition, a rare disease called Guillain-Barre syndrome that causes weakness and paralysis can occur several weeks after the initial illness.

How do people get campylobacteriosis? Campylobacteriosis is most commonly associated with eating raw or undercooked poultry. Chickens are frequently infected with *Campylobacter* although they show no symptoms. Past studies have shown that over half of the raw chicken sold in stores in the United States have *Campylobacter* on it. Cross-contamination with *Campylobacter* can sometimes occur when raw poultry is sliced on a cutting board, and the unwashed board or knife is then used to prepare vegetables or other lightly cooked foods. Eating anything contaminated with *Campylobacter* can result in illness. Animals can be infected by *Campylobacter*. Outbreaks of campylobacteriosis have occurred when people have drunk surface water that has been contaminated by infected birds or cows. Additionally, people have become ill from contact with infected dogs and cats, and from drinking or eating products made with unpasteurized milk from infected cows.

How is campylobacteriosis treated? Most people with campylobacteriosis recover fully without any antibiotics. However, it is important to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics should be reserved for very severe cases. People with diarrhea (especially children in day care or people who handle food) should not go to school, day care or work until the diarrhea ends, in order to prevent spreading campylobacteriosis to other people.

How common is campylobacteriosis? *Campylobacter* is one of the most common types of bacteria causing diarrhea in the United States. Approximately 2.5 million people (approximately one percent of the U.S population) are infected each year. There are well over 5000 cases of *Campylobacter* reported in California annually. Since many milder cases are not diagnosed or reported, the actual number of infections may be considerably higher.

What can a person do to prevent campylobacteriosis?

- Thoroughly cook all meats, especially poultry (to an internal temperature of 170°F for breast meat and 180°F for thigh meat). If you are served undercooked poultry in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Make sure that other foods, such as fruits or vegetables, do not come into contact with cutting boards or knives that have been used with raw meat or poultry. To avoid cross-contamination, carefully clean all cutting boards, countertops, and utensils with soap and hot water after preparing raw meat or poultry.
- Wash hands before preparing food and immediately after handling any raw poultry or meat.
- Always refrigerate meat products. Never leave raw meat at room temperature.
- Avoid drinking unpasteurized milk and untreated (not chlorinated or boiled) surface water.
- Wash hands well with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or handling pets, including animals at petting zoos. Make sure children also wash their hands well after going to the bathroom or handling pets.

What is the government doing about campylobacteriosis? The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) and Local Health Departments monitor cases of campylobacteriosis in California. Public health agencies, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are making an effort to educate the public about safe foodhandling practices, which is the best way of preventing campylobacteriosis. If there is an outbreak of campylobacteriosis, it may mean that a restaurant, food or water supply has a problem that requires investigation and intervention by the health department. CDHS will assist local health departments to investigate outbreaks of illness, find the source of contamination, and devise control measures.

Where can I get more information on campylobacteriosis? The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has information available on their website:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/campylobacter_g.htm